

BellSouth foundation donates \$20 million for virtual learning

By **DOUG GROSS**
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ATLANTA (AP) — The BellSouth Foundation, the charitable arm of the Atlanta-based communications company, announced plans Monday for a \$20 million effort to improve access to online learning.

The campaign will cover the nine Southern states that BellSouth Corp. serves and will help fund state-led virtual learning programs while seeking to expand computer access to children in poor areas.

"We wanted to be sure all kids, not just the privileged, could be part of the virtual learning movement," foundation President Mary Boehm said.

BellSouth currently offers service in Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Florida and Tennessee.

The BellSouth Foundation was created in 1986 and designed to focus on improving education.

In addition to helping bankroll and coordinate state virtual schools — like the one created in Georgia this year — the foundation will target specific low-income neighborhoods.

In Atlanta's Carver community, a pilot site for the effort, volunteers will help create a school of technology and work with middle and high school students on programs like job shadowing and an online

THE INITIATIVE

What: The BellSouth Foundation will donate \$20 million to improve access to online learning.

Why: "We wanted to be sure all kids, not just the privileged, could be part of the virtual learning movement," foundation President Mary Boehm said.

Where: The nine southern states served by BellSouth, including Kentucky.

algebra course.

The foundation hopes to create at least eight similar sites, one in each state.

Since its creation in 1986, the foundation has funded over 622 grants and operated numerous initiatives, with a total investment of more than \$56 million.

Boehm said the foundation's board decided over a year ago to pick one specific aspect of education, virtual learning and focus on it almost exclusively.

"All of those things were good, but quite honestly you can't be good in that many areas with \$3 million a year," Boehm said.

The \$20 million will be spent over five years, Boehm said.

On the Net:

BellSouth Foundation, <http://www.bellsouthfoundation.org>